United Nations A/C.3/55/SR.24

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
31 October 2000

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 24th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 16 October 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gittens-Joseph ..... (Trinidad and Tobago)

Contents

Agenda item 107: Advancement of women (*continued*)

Agenda item 111: Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

00-69246 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 107: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/C.3/55/L.12, L.14 and L.15)

Draft resolution A/C.3/55/L.12: Traffic in women and girls

1. **Ms. Morales** (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the sponsors, introduced the draft resolution. She drew attention to some minor editorial changes and announced that the delegations of Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Kenya, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Netherlands, Panama, the Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Viet Nam wished join the sponsors. The draft resolution incorporated the results of the recent special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the 1995 Beijing Conference, and the outcome of the recent deliberations of the Commission on Human Rights.

2. She condemned trafficking in women and girls, which was especially prevalent in her region of the world, as a violation of human rights. Since it was a transborder phenomenon, the international community must cooperate to combat that scourge, as for example in the Action Plan for the Asia-Pacific Region and the related European Union initiatives referred to in paragraph 5 of the draft resolution. Such actions should be strengthened and she urged all delegations to support the draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.3/55/L.14: Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system

3. **Ms. Wilcox** (Canada), speaking on behalf of the CANZ group of countries (Canada, Australia and New Zealand), introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors and announced that the delegations of Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, Fiji, Greece, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Slovenia and Spain wished to join the sponsors. The draft resolution, which incorporated some new elements drawn from the Secretary-General's report in document A/55/399, expressed regret that the goal of 50/50 gender balance had not been met and called for further efforts towards that goal. The sponsors had changed the name of the draft resolution to "Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system" in recognition of the broader scope of the draft. She hoped that it would once again receive wide support and be adopted by consensus.

Draft resolution A/C.3/55/L.15: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

4. **Ms. Skjoldager** (Denmark), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, announced that Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Panama and Slovenia had joined the sponsors. The draft resolution expressed disappointment that universal ratification of the Convention had not been achieved by 2000, while welcoming the fact that the Optional Protocol would enter into force on 22 December 2000. It emphasized the importance of full compliance with the Convention and urged States to limit or withdraw reservations to it. It also requested the Secretary-General to provide the resources necessary for the effective functioning of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Agenda item 111: Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/55/202 and A/55/268)

5. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director, New York Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) introduced the Secretary-General's report on Implementation of the programme of activities for the Decade (A/55/268) as well as his biennial report on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations (A/55/202). The former summarized activities undertaken by OHCHR from October 1999 to July 2000 and referred to the fifth session of the Working Group on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people, held in October 1999, at which some progress had been made although no further articles had been adopted. The sixth session would be held in Geneva from 20 November to 1 December 2000.

6. The largest gathering of indigenous peoples continued to be the annual sessions of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. At its eighteenth session, in July 2000, organized in close cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Office in Geneva and the Committee on the Rights of

the Child, it had focused on indigenous children and youth and had made a number of recommendations, in particular relating to future action by the Committee and UNICEF to strengthen their activities aimed at indigenous children. It had also recommended the establishment of a permanent forum on indigenous issues, expanded the indigenous fellowship programme and marked 9 August as the International Day of the World's Indigenous People. He noted that commemoration of that event in Geneva and New York had focused on indigenous children and youth, with the participation of UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as representatives of indigenous organizations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank. In addition, on 10 August, OHCHR had organized indigenous consultations in New York in preparation for the forthcoming World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The report on the activities for the Decade (A/55/268) also described the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and the United Nations Trust Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, both administered by OHCHR.

7. The report on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations (A/55/202) provided information about contributions and disbursements and he noted that financing had been more stable, with travel assistance having been provided to 95 indigenous representatives.

8. The proclamation of the International Decade had raised high expectations among indigenous peoples. Ambitious but realistic objectives had been set and their implementation depended on the will of Member States. The High Commissioner had welcomed the establishment by the Economic and Social Council of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and looked forward to it becoming a major contributor to United Nations policy-making. The High Commissioner had also expressed her support for the drafting of the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and stood ready to cooperate to ensure its successful completion.

9. **Ms. Kristensen** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and her own country, Greenland), welcomed the landmark decision by the Economic and Social Council in July 2000 (E/2000/22) to establish a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as a subsidiary organ of the Council, an important objective of the International Decade and an important achievement in the advancement of the aspirations of indigenous people worldwide. She urged Member States and other parties concerned to play an active role in the preparation of that new Forum.

10. She regretted that a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples had not yet been adopted; while recognizing the difficulty of reconciling the legitimate aspirations of indigenous peoples with the equally legitimate concerns of Governments, she urged members to draft and adopt a document which would turn the aspirations of the indigenous peoples into rights. The emerging consensus in the Working Group established by the Commission on Human Rights, based on the overall theme of the Decade, "Indigenous people: partnership in action", could point the way towards a solution.

11. She welcomed the Secretary-General's reports on the activities for the Decade (A/55/268) and on the status of the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations (A/55/202), which dealt with a wide range of issues and showed that the Decade was indeed a very useful framework for action. It was gratifying that indigenous issues were being mainstreamed by a great number of agencies and bodies of the United Nations system, as well as other regional and international organizations, which were taking an active part in implementing the Decade, in particular by establishing focal points and contact with indigenous peoples and launching concrete activities for their benefit. That trend should be encouraged and, on behalf of the Nordic countries and the Saami and Inuit peoples, she stressed the need to seize the momentum created by the International Decade and meet their expectations, and pledged continued support for the legitimate cause of indigenous peoples everywhere.

12. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) said that international efforts must be renewed to find solutions to the problems facing indigenous people. The establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was a practical demonstration of States' commitment to the overriding philosophy of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People — partnership in action. Encouraging progress had been made in integrating awareness of indigenous issues in the main activities of the United Nations, but

more needed to be done to ensure coordination among its agencies. She called for the inclusion of indigenous representatives in official delegations to international conferences. Her delegation was encouraged by the higher level of participation of States in the negotiations on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and by the constructive dialogue between States and indigenous representatives.

13. As the Maori population in New Zealand was relatively young, her Government attached special importance to issues affecting them. At the eighteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, focused on indigenous children and youth, her Government had hosted a capacity-building workshop on its youth justice system and had funded the participation of two young Maoris as observers. It remained firmly committed to the goal of empowering the Maori communities so that they could take greater control of their own development. One of its key initiatives was devoted to capacity-building, with a view to building a partnership between indigenous organizations and communities and the State sector. Major human rights instruments continued to be translated into the Maori language and her Government in a significant step in respect of the Decade, was reviewing its position on the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) and was consulting the Maori people on the implications of ratifying that Convention.

14. For the remainder of the Decade, New Zealand would be switching its focus from the Maori language to indigenous culture and heritage. Activities within the framework of the Decade should deliver practical outcomes for indigenous people: the Permanent Forum, for example, gave indigenous people a voice within the United Nations and had a key coordinating role for United Nations programmes aimed at them. However, the aims of the Decade could only be achieved if adequate funding from the regular budget was forthcoming. Her Government, for its part, was committed to ensuring, at the domestic level, that Maori had greater control over their own destiny and, at the international level, that indigenous issues were addressed constructively within the United Nations system.

15. **Mr. Barskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People had served to increase the visibility of indigenous issues at both the national and international levels. Many bodies within the United Nations had incorporated indigenous concerns into their programmes in line with the Decade's goals. The decision to establish a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues under the Economic and Social Council was particularly welcome. However, the success of the Decade should be evaluated on the basis of specific indicators of improvement in the lives of indigenous peoples. His Government was thus in the process of establishing a system for the effective protection of the rights and interests of the Federation's indigenous minorities, and had recently promulgated extensive legislation to protect traditional livelihoods and indigenous land rights and to provide means of legal redress in respect of damage to indigenous habitats. Principles for indigenous self-government had also been developed for the Russian Far North, Siberia and Far East, and indigenous communes were now being established on the basis of clan as well as territorial affiliation.

16. According to a new government register, forty-five distinct peoples in the Russian Federation now qualified as "indigenous". Economic and social programmes had also been developed in order to promote the sustainable development of those peoples, as well as of their traditional lifestyles and means of subsistence. In the Russian Far North, efforts were being made to meet transport requirements in a more ecologically sound manner and to develop new energy sources which would make remote areas independent of fuel deliveries from elsewhere. Provision was also being made for welfare assistance for vulnerable groups in the Russian Far North. Particular attention was also being accorded to pre-school education and vocational training for indigenous peoples. Those were but a few of the measures taken by his Government to benefit indigenous peoples; much remained to be done to further the goals of the Decade.

17. **Mr. Heyward** (Australia) said that his Government unequivocally condemned racial prejudice in any form and strongly supported the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. It remained committed to the development of a suitable and effective declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and to the establishment of a representative and accountable forum to better coordinate United Nations activity on indigenous issues. Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/22 reflected the broad agreement that such a body should be established, but further discussion was needed to clarify the issues of funding and the fate of existing United Nations mechanisms whose roles overlapped with those envisaged for the new body.

18. His Government's approach to indigenous issues was based on the principle that indigenous peoples should have greater opportunities for exercising meaningful control over their affairs. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had access to special legislation and programmes to safeguard their rights, and over half of government expenditure on programmes specifically for indigenous people was controlled by elected indigenous boards. The Government was committed to redressing the colonial legacy of ongoing social and economic disadvantage faced by the indigenous peoples in Australia, and had spent a record 2.2 billion Australian dollars in 1999-2000 to improve indigenous people's health, housing, education, employment and training opportunities.

19. While true reconciliation could only be achieved through improving the standard of living of indigenous Australians, symbolic actions were also important, and the Australian Parliament had expressed its commitment to reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and its regret for past injustices suffered by indigenous Australians. Advancing indigenous peoples' economic and social rights and opportunities was vital to achieving lasting reconciliation. To that end, his Government and Australian indigenous representatives participated fully in the international forums on indigenous issues.

20. The Australian vision was of a culturally diverse and tolerant society based on mutual respect, but indigenous disadvantage was still a reality and the tremendous contribution that indigenous peoples could make to the development of the States to which they belonged was being wasted. He therefore encouraged all States, in partnership with their own indigenous peoples, to contribute to the activities of the Decade in order to resolve the problems and protect the human rights of indigenous peoples throughout the world.

21. **Ms. Pria** (Mexico) said that recognition of the right of any group of people to cultural differences was vital in countries like Mexico, where the cultural heritage of over 60 indigenous peoples was continuously being preserved and renewed. Mexico was a culturally diverse and multi-ethnic country and multiculturalism was embodied in its Constitution, but before indigenous demands could be incorporated into law, it was necessary to establish rights and duties that could be effectively protected and fulfilled.

22. People who, for historical or other reasons, found themselves in a vulnerable position typically found it difficult to break out of their exclusion and marginalization unaided. Her Government's response was to set up employment programmes and to help disadvantaged social groups to manage farming projects by providing them with technical and financial resources. The aim was to achieve equal opportunities for all and to guarantee individual and collective rights, so as to raise standards of living. To that end, government spending on social development had risen in 2000 to almost 10 per cent of gross domestic product. Almost 14 million people benefited from a programme to help the poor regions: children of poor families were given education grants, peasants and farm labourers received help, and loans were made available for building and upgrading housing. Their life expectancy had subsequently increased by almost three years during the past five years. Efforts were being made to ensure that government programmes for indigenous peoples were coordinated and comprehensive. The activities of the National Indigenous Institute were therefore always based on an understanding of the complex realities of indigenous peoples and aimed at their active involvement in those activities.

23. Efforts were also being made to overcome the lack of contact between different government departments. The problems faced by indigenous people held in detention had been addressed by providing interpreters and improving coordination between prosecutors and the courts. Given the need for all-inclusive social policies based on shared values, her Government saw the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples as one of the main objectives of the International Decade. In 1999 it had set up the Mexican Advisory Body as a democratic forum that involved indigenous representatives in policy-making and the coordination of activities in all social sectors.

24. It was a historic moment for indigenous participation in Mexico and throughout the world: new targets needed to be set in order to help the people who had been neglected to promote their development and respect for their cultural differences and grant them effective access to the State's legal system.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.